

THE LATER MINISTRY OF SAKYAMUNI

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THERE are a large number of events in the life of Sakyamuni, which are related in the canonical works and other places, which we must consider, briefly at least. We cannot concern ourselves with the large amount of material which tells of the Rules of the Order, and the various teachings on different subjects, given by the Master, for these would take us too far afield. The purpose of this chapter is rather to outline the principle types of experience which were more or less common to the forty-five years of his active work. These may be summarized under three heads, (1) Living Conditions, and Difficulties. (2) Journeys. (3) The relationship of the Teacher with his Disciples.

(1) *Living Conditions and Difficulties.* While extreme asceticism as such was definitely renounced as a way of life by Sakyamuni before his enlightenment, the adoption of the mendicant garb and the begging bowl was at least a partial recognition of its value. The Bhikkus definitely accepted a life of celibacy and seclusion from ordinary society and its interests. It does not appear that the Order suffered greatly from under-nourishment or starvation. They were frequently invited to feasts, and seem to have been well received by those to whom they appealed for food. They were looked upon as "holy men" but not as ascetics in the stricter sense.¹ On the other hand strict rules were drawn up against immorality, and any Bhikku who had intercourse with a woman was expelled from the Order. On one occasion we are told, Sakyamuni was offered a young woman by her father, but he at once rejects the offer in most contemptuous terms.

The general living conditions of the Order were improved grad-

¹*Sacred Books of the East*, XIII, 172.

²*Sacred Books of the East*, X (ii), 158-62.

ually year by year. The place of abode was frequently changed to suit the varying needs of the Indian climate, and the exigencies of the work of preaching. Regulation in regard to food, dress, sanitation, medicines, and a large variety of other subjects related to ordinary daily life, are given in the Mahavagga and the Kullavagga, and constitute quite a proportion of the available literature of the Canon. These accounts make it possible for us to picture the rapid growth of the band of disciples, making necessary the adaptation of certain general principles of life in their growing and diversified needs. Not infrequently a rule is given, and almost immediately withdrawn. The general purpose however seems to be to maintain an order of life, which on the one hand, does not concentrate thought on the flesh by an attempt to mortify it, and on the other does not encourage the development of desire by self-indulgence.

We must not gather, however, that the life of the Order was entirely one of comfortable ease and harmony. Not a few difficulties were encountered. Some were from without; others arose within. Criticism of the Order from those outside was not infrequent. Celibacy was criticized as causing fathers to beget no sons, and wives to become widows, and families to become extinct.³ The somewhat crude manners of the disciples also came in for criticism. They were said to be improperly dressed, and to be indecent and even gluttonous in their manner of requesting and eating food.⁴ Among the Bhikkus themselves frequent disharmonies arose. On one occasion, when the quarrelling grew too intense and out of hand, the Blessed One moved and "dwelt in Parikeyakka, in the Rakkhita Grove, at the foot of the Bhaddasala tree", where he thus meditates to himself. "Formerly I did not live at ease, being troubled by these litigious, contentious disputations Bhikkus of Kosambi, the constant raisers of questions before the Samgha. But now, being alone and without a companion, I live pleasantly and at ease, remote from these litigious, contentions, quarrelsome, disputations Bhikkus of Kosambi, the constant raisers of questions before the Samgha."⁵ This period of solitude did not last for long; but the conditions which made it necessary for the ever-patient Sakya to leave his company of Bhikkus for a period of rest, must have been acute indeed. It is evident that some of the dissensions were very deep-

³*Sacred Books of the East*, XIII, 150.

⁴*Sacred Books of the East*, XIII, 152, also XX, 250.

⁵*Sacred Books of the East*, 312, also XX, 238, XIII, 349.

seated indeed. Even before his death, a Judas appears, as we shall see later. Almost immediately after, there is a schism among his followers, resulting in the breaking up of the Order into groups, united only by their common loyalty to the great Founder. The attitude which Sakyamuni shows to these increasing discords is one of unchanging patience. Only on this one occasion does he find it necessary to leave his little company of disciples, for a breathing space alone.

On several occasions Sakyamuni was exposed to very real personal danger, due to the treachery of his cousin Devadatta, who from youth had been his evil genius. Toward the close of the Buddha's life, Devadatta made definite plans to kill him, and take from him the control of the Order. These stories are told not only in the extra-canonical works⁶ but in the *Kullavagga* as well⁷ and may therefore be considered as having at least some basis in history. Devadatta, who is not only his cousin, but the son of another Rajah, was even in childhood a rival and competitor of the young Prince, as we have seen. He later joins the Order, and by an apparent change of heart, merits the good will of a large number of people, and the praises of the Blessed One himself.⁸ Toward the close of Sakyamuni's life, Devadatta seeks to displace him. First, he tries guile, suggesting that the Blessed One is old and had better retire in his favor. Later when this method is unsuccessful, he conspires with another Prince, the son of King Bimbisara,—Agatasattu, by name,—to kill him. The agreement is that Agatasattu is to kill his own father with a dagger, while Devadatta is to kill the Buddha. Later they will join forces, Agatasattu as King, and Devadatta as head of the Buddhist Order. Agatasattu is caught red-handed and confesses it is Devadatta that has led him to do the act. His father, King Bimbisara, then retires in favor of his son, and allows him to become King. Devadatta appears again, requesting the services of sixteen of Agatasattu's men, who are to be stationed on the four paths which the Buddha may possibly travel,—four on each path,—in order to kill him. These men are converted however on the appearance of the Blessed One, and the plot is rendered futile. Devadatta, finding his efforts balked again, climbs to the top of the mountain beneath which the Buddha is resting, and hurls down a

⁶Fo Sho, *Sacred Books of the East*, XIX, 246-9; also King Milinda, *Sacred Books of the East*, XXXV, 290-300.

⁷*Sacred Books of the East*, XX, 238-65.

⁸*Ibid.*, XX, 240.

rock to crush him. But again he is saved; two mountain peaks coming together stop the descent of the rock, only a splinter of which strikes his foot and causes it to bleed. Still another attempt is made by Devadatta, who arranges with the keepers of a fierce elephant to loosen him as the Samana (Sakyamuni) is coming down the carriage road. The result is that while the Bhikkus are terrified and run away, Sakya, with wonderful self-control is able to quiet the rage of the elephant. "Touch not, O elephant, the elephant of men; for sad, O elephant is such attack; for no bliss is there, O elephant, when he has passed from hence, for him who strikes the elephant of men." The elephant is "touched by his sense of love" and with his trunk takes up the dust from the feet of the Blessed One, and sprinkles it upon his head; he thereafter becomes tame, thus greatly increasing the good reputation of the Samana, while that of Devadatta suffers proportionately.⁹ Devadatta later leaves the Order, taking with him the five hundred Bhikkus of Vesali, and endeavours to found a rival Order. Two of Buddha's chief supporters however go with them, and await an opportunity to make a counter-stroke. Later in the evening, when Devadatta is tired, one of them preaches to the five-hundred, so effectively that they repent of their schism, and return to their former Master.

(2) *The Journeys*. It is a most difficult task to try to follow the travels of the great Teacher and his Bhikkus during the 45 years between the enlightenment and his death. Accounts are meagre, and there is no attempt whatever at chronology. Sometimes the transition is made from one place to another without any mention of a journey, which must have intervened. At other times the fact of his being in one place is stated several times, leaving the reader uncertain whether it is the same or different occasions that is meant. A perusal of the Mahavagga and Kullavagga will give one a fair idea of the general method of itinerary which he followed. There seem to be two distinct periods which we can notice, one coming before and the second after the adoption of a regular retirement during the rainy season.

The enlightenment took place at Uruvela, on the banks of the Nerangara¹⁰ river. The place of meditation is changed from one tree to another, several times. It is scarcely likely that these changes

⁹These stories of the mountain and the elephant, while impossible if understood literally, illustrate the traditional belief in the power of the Buddha over nature and wild animals.

¹⁰The modern Phalgu.

From this time on, the return to Savatthi is frequently mentioned. We cannot be sure whether each mention of a journey thither represents one of the consecutive rainy seasons or not. It is altogether possible that some years are not mentioned. Again, in several instances, Savatthi is mentioned several times, with no story of journeys elsewhere intervening. Do these represent the same stay, or events of several visits? We cannot tell. If we take each mention of Savatthi after journeys to other places, as indicating a retreat during the rainy season, and at the same time understand that when mentioned several times together the same sojourn, during one season is intended, we will have a period of eleven years covered, as follows:

1. Savatthi, Ragagaha, Benares, Rhaddiya.
2. Savatthi, Ragagaha,
3. Savatthi, Ragagaha, Benares, Andhakaomda, Ragagaha, Pataligama, Kotogama, Natika, Vesali, Apana, Kusinara, Atuma,
4. Savatthi, Ragagaha, Bhakkina giri, Vesali, Benares,
5. Savatthi, Kampa, Kosambi, Balaka, Eastern Bambu Park, Parileyyaka,
6. Savatti, Kosomba,
7. Savatthi, (mentioned four times) Ragagaha (twice) Vesali, Bhagga,
8. Savatthi, Ragagaha, Vesali.
9. Savatthi, Avali, Ragagaha, Anupiya, Kosambi, Ragagaha.
10. Savatthi, (mentioned twice) Kapilavastu, Vesali,
11. Savatthi, end of Kullavagga record.

This list at best covers only a period of from eleven to fifteen years, however. What of the journeys of the other twenty or thirty years? There are three possibilities of explaining away the problem. First, we may think of the adoption of the retreat for the rainy season as coming later in his life, spreading the early part of the Mahavagga over a long period. Second, we might think of the Kullavagga record as ending a long time before his death,¹⁴— and no account of the intervening period, between the end of Book X of the Kullavagga and the beginning of the Parinibbana Sutta. Third, it is possible that none of the records cover at all completely the periods with which they deal; we must then imagine the list which

¹⁴This is not the end of the Kullavagga however. Books 11 and 12 give the accounts of the Council's after Sakyamuni's death.

we have drawn up as covering a much longer period than it suggests, with probably many journeys entirely dropped out.

The one fact which is evident from the records is that we cannot be dogmatic concerning dates. We have no attempt at a chronological scheme for these years, in any of the records. The subject was of no interest to them whatever. As Rhys Davids says, "The dwellers in the valley of the Ganges for many generations after Gotama's death were a happy people, who had no need of dates."¹⁵ Their life was a very free one. A robe or two, a begging bowl and perhaps a staff was all the baggage they needed. Except for the rainy season, a park or grove was a sufficient shelter. If a storm arose there were friendly caves and sheds where they might take refuge. And while there is evidence that the band lived in comfortable quarters for part of the year, probably a good deal of their time was spent out of doors in some park, or by the roadside as many do in India today.

(3) *His relations with his Disciples.* There is place for only a very casual treatment of this question, but there are a few outstanding facts which ought to be mentioned.

(a) Requirements for admission into the Samgha or Order were at first quite loose, but were made more stringent as time went on. The whole of the first Khandhaka of the Mahavagga, covering 165 pages in the English translation is devoted to the question of "Admission to the Order of Bhikkus"¹⁶ Some of the more important elements we have considered in a previous chapter. The best summary of the rules for admission as they later took form, is probably that found in the Sabhiyasutta, where a probation of four months and certain other formalities are required.¹⁷ (b) The admission of women as Bhikkuni or nuns was a conclusion arrived at only after some hesitancy, and at the earnest request of Ananda, his favorite disciple.¹⁸ Even then the concession was granted on account of the pitiful appeal of Gotami, his foster-mother. She stood outside the porch, with swollen feet, dust covered and weeping. The heart of Ananda is moved and he is finally able to persuade the Blessed One that she should be admitted.¹⁹ The permission granted her was gradually extended to others. The tenth Khandhaka of the Kulla-

¹⁵*Sacred Books of the East*, page xlv, Introduction.

¹⁶*Sacred Books of the East*, XIII, 73-238.

¹⁷*Sacred Books of the East*, X (ii) 94; XI, 109; XIII, 188.

¹⁸They had been admitted as lay disciples before. See Ch. VIII

¹⁹*Sacred Books of the East*, XX, 320.

vagga is concerned particularly with the problems which grew out of this situation, and a code of special regulations were drawn up for them.²⁰ Buddhaghosha reminds us that the Bhikkuni or women disciples were allowed to live only in villages, and that some of the modifications of discipline were due to that fact.²¹

(c) *The Position of Disciples.* Sakyamuni seems to have tried to invest the position of the disciple with as much reverence and honor as possible. The Sangha or Order was and has always been one of the three great Buddhist treasures. Doubt or lack of faith in the Sangha is a sign of spiritual barrenness,²² but faith is the possession of the mirror of truth.²³

During his lifetime Sakya seems to have exercised a rather imperious and arbitrary authority over his disciples. Later non-canonical scriptures describe him as having a parental relationship to the Order, and an authority over it.²⁴ On the other hand however he foretold for them an independent authority after his death. Each man must work out his own salvation for himself. For even the Buddha is not the source of their dependence.²⁵ Each is to be independent, even to the extent of abolishing all the lesser and minor precepts, if they saw fit.²⁶

(d) Ananda, the beloved disciple of Sakyamuni deserves special mention. He is one of those characters of history who find their chief happiness in being present with and serving a great master. He was not one of the first to join, but came in with a group of Sakvans, including Upali the barber²⁷ and Devadatta,—the cousin of Sakyamuni, and his evil genius.²⁸ It was not long however before Ananda came to have a very special relationship with his master. He is frequently pictured as the spokesman of the disciples in their interviews with the Blessed One,²⁹ and is addressed by him as the representative of the group.³⁰ It is he who intercedes for the Bhikkuni, and who is the constant attendant upon his master during

²⁰*Ibid.*, 343, 352.

²¹*Sacred Books of the East*, XIII, 256 note.

²²*Sacred Books of the East*, XI, 224, 228.

²³*Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴*Sacred Books of the East*, XXXV, 150; XXXVI, 51-56.

²⁵*Sacred Books of the East*, XI, 36-9.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁷This is evidently a different Upali from the child who cried at daybreak, as related above; though he was also a Sakyan.

²⁸*Sacred Books of the East*, XX, 228-33, also XIX, 226. The story of how he was chosen for his position is told in the Teragatha CCLX.

²⁹*Sacred Books of the East*, XIII, 202-6; XVII, 87; XX, 299.

³⁰XVII, 36, 41, 43, 69, 118, 191, etc., etc.

his last hours.³¹ Though he is not an Arhat at the time of his master's death, he is chosen as one of the representatives at the first Council of Ragagaha, and is thereupon given Arhatship.³²

The later non-canonical scriptures further glorify Ananda. He is represented as the only one who remains at the side of the Buddha when he is attacked by the elephant.³³ He remembers his own previous births, and the Buddhas of the past.³⁴ He is taught by the Buddha concerning the western Paradise and the great vow of Amida.³⁵ These fictitious legends add nothing however to the real glory which he attained, as being one of the greatest historical examples of loyalty and devotion and the chief confidant and support of one of the world's greatest men.

³¹*Sacred Books of the East*, XI, Mahaparinibbana Sutta. See next chapter.

³²*Sacred Books of the East*, XX, 373-9.

³³*Sacred Books of the East*, XIX, 247; XXXV, 297-300.

³⁴XXXV, 122.

³⁵XLIX, (ii) 168-201.